

**Orange County
Commission for the Environment**

Meeting Summary

February 9, 2015

Orange County Solid Waste Administration Building, Chapel Hill

PRESENT: Jan Sassaman (Chair), May Becker, Peter Cada, Tom Eisenhart, Loren Hintz, David Neal, Bill Newby, Jeanette O'Connor, Sheila Thomas-Ambat, Lydia Wegman, and David Welch

ABSENT: Donna Lee Jones, Rebecca Ray, Gary Saunders

STAFF: Rich Shaw, Tom Davis, Brennan Bouma, David Stancil

GUESTS: Penny Rich (County Commissioner), Eric Gerringer, Muriel Williman, Lynne Gronback

- I. **Call to Order** – Sassaman called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.
- II. **Additions or Changes to Agenda** – Sassaman changed the order of Items III and IV.
- IV. **Welcome New Member** – Sassaman introduced two guests: Commissioner Penny Rich and Lynne Gronback, science teacher at Cedar Ridge High School. Sassaman then welcomed Tom Eisenhart to the commission. Eisenhart said he is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Chemistry at UNC, but his educational background includes studies in both the technical and social science aspects of sustainability. He served on the Renewable Energy Special Projects Committee at UNC.
- III. **Minutes** – Sassaman asked for comments on the January 12 meeting summary. O'Connor motioned to approve; seconded by Wegman. Approved unanimously.
- V. **Composting of Food Waste** – Sassaman introduced Eric Gerringer and Muriel Williman—both with the Orange County Solid Waste Management Department. Gerringer provided an overview of the County's Recycling Program, including recent enhancements to the urban and rural curbside recycling. He described current efforts to compost commercial and residential food waste. The collection of commercial food waste from 35 sites (mostly restaurants and grocery stores) is handled by Brooks Contracting. Participants must produce at least one ton per month. Three new sites were added in the past year. Gerringer said 1,500 tons of food waste and other compostable organic matter is diverted from the landfill disposal each year. He said residential collection is currently available at the Walnut Grove convenience center, and in 2016 collection will also be available at the Eubanks Road facility.

Wegman asked what problems are there with the commercial program, and requested a list of participants. Gerringer said there is contamination of the food waste, which requires education and monitoring for quality control. Thomas-Ambat asked how contaminants are removed. Gerringer said plastics, foil and other materials are removed upon inspection. He said he will provide a list of participants in the program.

Becker noted that the CFE had sent a resolution of its support for expanding the food waste collection and composting to the BOCC, and hoped something would result from that action. Gerringer said the program is fully funded at the present time; there is room

for more participation and they've not had to turn down any prospective sources. He noted, however, that the budget for next year will be developed soon. Commissioner Rich said the Solid Waste Advisory Group (SWAG) would be looking into the program beginning this coming Friday's meeting (February 13).

Finally, Gerringer said the University of North Carolina collects 50 tons of food waste each month from three cafeterias on campus. Commissioner Rich noted that the County is discussing a partnership with UNC and the hospital on all recyclables.

Williman provided an overview of the Solid Waste department's education and outreach services, including her efforts to reduce the amounts of solid waste at special events such as Hog Day, Festifall, and Farm to Fork. She described recent progress with the recycling in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School system.

Wegman asked if there was anything the CFE could do to help. Gerringer and Rich invited CFE members to attend the SWAG meetings and to participate in the discussion. Hintz added that the CFE could also help by publicizing solid waste recycling programs as part of the CFE's forthcoming public outreach efforts.

CFE members thanked Gerringer and Williman for their presentations.

- VI. **Hydrilla in the Eno River** – Davis presented information about hydrilla, an invasive submerged aquatic weed that is infesting portions of the Eno River. Davis described the problems caused by hydrilla and the difficulties with getting rid of it from ponds and waterways. He said it has been a problem at Lake Orange since the early 1990s and was first documented in Eno River State Park in 2005. A 2013 survey found that about 25 miles of the river contained hydrilla—15 miles of which had “heavy infestation.”

Davis said he is a member of the Eno River Hydrilla Management Task Force, a group of federal, state, and local government representatives that have been working since 2007 to evaluate and address this situation. The available options include no action, physical removal, biological control, and the use of EPA-approved herbicides.

Davis reported the task force is preparing a two-year pilot study to evaluate the use of EPA-approved herbicide to manage hydrilla in a section of the Eno River below Hillsborough's drinking water intake at Lake Ben Johnston. He has organized a public information open house to be held on April 29 at the Whitted Building in Hillsborough.

He asked the CFE to help with the public outreach effort to educate citizens about hydrilla and to invite them to the public information meeting. O'Connor asked what the sources of hydrilla in the Eno are, and would this herbicide treatment have any lasting effect. Davis said the likely sources are residential aquariums, boat paddles, or boat trailers. He said this is a pilot study to determine the effectiveness of the treatments. If it works then it could be one of the options to help manage this aquatic weed. Other CFE members asked questions about the proposed study. Shaw noted that the Water Resources Committee had identified hydrilla as a topic for public outreach, using the information contained in the SOE report. The CFE thanked Davis for his presentation.

- VII. **Public Outreach** – CFE members continued their discussion of ways to convey information from State of Environment report to the general public. Sassaman asked each committee to identify its initial topic and who will prepare the draft article.

Wegman reported she had spoken with Mark Schultz, editor of the Chapel Hill News, about including the CFE's series of articles in his newspaper. She said Schultz is willing to publish articles of 550 to 600 words. Shaw said the News of Orange County will also include the articles, but he is not yet sure of the length. Shaw will report back on this.

Before breaking out into the committees, Sassaman asked Shaw if there was anything particularly noteworthy to discuss from the update and information items.

- IX. **Updates and Information Items** – Information on the following subjects was provided in the meeting package: a) Earth Evening (April 24), b) County delivers recycling roll cars to rural service, c) County to install additional electric vehicle charging stations, d) Hillsborough historic district eases process for solar panels, e) Leaks persist at coal ash ponds, f) OWASA annual report to Orange County, g) NC Botanical Garden hires new director, h) covering parking lots with solar panels, i) the social cost of carbon due to climate change, and j) cities setting targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Shaw asked CFE members to consider helping with the County's Earth Evening event to be held on April 24 at River Park in Hillsborough.

- VIII. **Committee Meetings** - Sassaman asked members to break into committees to identify its initial topic and who will prepare the draft article. Each of the standing committees met for about 20 minutes.
- X. **Adjournment** – Sassaman adjourned at approximately 9:15 pm.

Summary by Rich Shaw, DEAPR Staff